

The boundary within: equality, hierarchy, and exclusion in Azad Jammu and Kashmir

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Many inhabitants of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) hold the belief that their society is not only more egalitarian today than that of their forefathers', but also more egalitarian than that in Pakistan. According to them, Pakistani society continues to be highly hierarchical with stark class and caste-like boundaries, while in AJK these boundaries have become weaker and merely symbolic since the 1970s due to changes in four interconnected factors; namely, migration patterns, land ownership, access to education, and democratic politics. This created an unprecedented level of social mobility among and within *biradaris*, the caste-like kinship corporate entities that are the crucial social boundary in this region. Yet, the main factor dictating membership in the *biradari* – endogamy – did not change, and access to power and resources is still determined mostly through *biradari*-ism. In this paper, I examine how notions of hierarchy and social stratification evolved over time and what contributed to this evolution. I argue and conclude that AJK society is still hierarchical but it has gained an element of fluidity.

Keywords: social stratification; *biradari*; caste; Kashmir; Pakistan

Introduction

[Azad] Kashmir is different from Pakistan. Here we're all equals; we don't have hierarchy. We're close, united communities. The goras [white people] are like this as well. We are educated like them; that's why there's equality. Just like Islam tells us. (Bashir, shopkeeper in Chinati bazaar)

When describing their society, people in Chinati¹ bazaar and its surrounding villages will often proudly state that theirs is an egalitarian society, at least compared to their forefathers' time as well as to Pakistan. According to them Pakistani society is a highly hierarchical one, with stark class and caste-like boundaries. They will point out that their society too had been similarly stratified in the past, but since the 1970s these boundaries had become weaker and more symbolic. Their narratives and practices though also contain a sub-text, often quite explicit, of a continuing differentiation between people. The crucial element for stratification in this region is the *biradari*, a caste-like and/or kinship corporate entity that is 'the primary factor amongst the primordial loyalties which govern social organisation' (Alavi 1972, 27), through which most people attempt to gain access to power and resources. Yet, *biradari* is a complex and often fluid concept that must be localised and contextualised

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before any attempt is made to understand how social stratification is lived in this region, as different conceptions of *biradari* come with different drawings of boundaries. This discussion is crucial not only for better understanding Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK),² but also for Pakistan, as caste-based discrimination and oppression is widespread throughout many parts of the country but is rarely discussed or analysed publicly (Gazdar 2007).

In this article, I analyse how people in a cluster of villages surrounding a small rural bazaar in AJK experience social stratification. I try to understand why many of them think of their society as egalitarian. I do so by examining how social stratification changed over time, or at least how the norms for assessing the relative hierarchical positions have changed. This provides me a context to explore social stratification in AJK. I argue that while the importance of some criteria did change over time – namely land ownership, education, and occupation – others remained the same, crucially endogamy. Some groups benefited more than others from this re-configuration, particularly the ones using their numerical strength to access power and resources through *biradari* politics, or *biradari*-ism.

Pakistani and AJK societies have undergone dramatic changes as a consequence of labour migration – particularly Gulf migration – and remittances. The fact that people from AJK say they are egalitarian, or at least more egalitarian than people in Pakistan, is a useful assertion on its own – even if somehow overstated – as it shows us a common thread in the region of stressing ‘difference’: different from the past; different from ‘the other Kashmir’; different from Pakistan. The basis for determining relative position within hierarchies has changed across large parts of South Asia (Gupta 2004), particularly where there have been drastic livelihood changes linked to, for instance, Gulf migration (Gardner and Osella 2004). The sheer number of labour migrants to the Gulf (and the UK) from this region along with the inflow of remittances though might have accelerated the pace of change in AJK as well as made the scale of the phenomenon more noticeable.

I use a mix of ethnographic research and census data to support my assertions. The ethnographic research comes from my doctoral fieldwork in a rural bazaar and surrounding villages in the southern part of Bagh District, central AJK, from late 2008 until early 2010, an area I had previously surveyed in August 2006 when I ran a series of post-2005 earthquake surveys on informal social protection mechanisms. Like throughout AJK, in Bagh District public life is centred on the bazaar. In this district, characterised by high numbers of migrants to the Gulf, most rural bazaars are places that are both ‘global’ and ‘local’, places where people, things, and ideas pass through in an otherwise highly secluded region.³ The defining feature of my fieldwork was the use of participant observation and within it unstructured and semi-structured interviews, direct observation, life stories, and life event analyses, and, as much as I could, participation in ‘local life’. Due to a lack of accommodation in the villages, I lived in hotels in Bagh and Rawalakot cities and drove daily to the bazaar. Living in these cities allowed me to engage in conversations with some urban residents, namely the owners, managers, and workers of the hotels where I stayed, government bureaucrats, NGO workers, and some local influentials. This interaction gave my research a regional flare and contributes to my analysis by helping me situate the bazaar conversations within the larger regional narratives.

The article is divided into two parts: first, I explore the range of overlapping meanings of *biradari* and related terms, situating them within the debates on hierarchy and social stratification within South Asian Muslim communities, Pakistan, and AJK, respectively. I then analyse how local notions of hierarchy and social stratification have evolved over time in Chinati, identifying the actions involved in creating, recreating, and maintaining the *biradari* as ‘the’ social boundary: on the one hand, the four interconnected factors that

contributed to a relaxation of boundaries, namely migration, education, land ownership, and democratic politics; and, on the other hand, the key factor preventing it – endogamy. I conclude by arguing that economic and political changes are not sufficient per se to flatten social stratification, yet they allow for enough fluidity and ambiguity for some groups to access power and resources, and for other groups to be further excluded.

Stratification in South Asian Muslim societies

Most studies of Muslim communities in India show that if not similar to the Hindu caste system, these communities have caste-like features in their social organisation. For instance, according to Misra (1964 in Simpson 2006) in Gujarat the Muslim system developed in a ‘symbiotic relationship’ with the Hindu caste system, therefore becoming part of the whole. In Andhra Pradesh Benson (1983 in Fanselow 1996) witnesses structural parallels between Muslim social stratification and Hindu caste in terms of ranking, endogamy, and occupational specialisation. In Calcutta (Siddiqui 1978), Ranchi (Ali 1978), Old Delhi (Goodfriend 1983 in Simpson 2006), and Tamil Nadu (Vatuk 1996) Muslim communities emphasise notions of purity of blood, with reference to Arab descent, as a reason to prevent interethnic marriages. Still in Tamil Nadu, Mines (1975 in Simpson 2006) discards the notion of comparing Muslim social hierarchy to Hindu caste structure because in the former ranking occurred mainly at the individual level and not at a wider social level. Then again, we can see all of Hutton’s (1946 in Leach 1960) primary characteristics that together embody the real essence of caste (endogamy, commensality, hierarchy, pollution, occupation, birth status, and higher group prestige) in some Muslim societies in parts of rural Pakistan (Mohmand and Gazdar 2007), albeit with a generous degree of fluidity. Madan (1981 in Fanselow 1996) and Lindholm (1996) suggest that the answer to whether Indian Muslims have caste or not depends on who are we asking the question – and Fanselow (1996, 222) alerts us to the fact that ‘it is the observer who decides that caste exists and not the actors’, depending on which definition of caste and which factors are selected by the observer.⁴

There are two main issues in this debate: one of contradiction and the other of belonging. The former is perceived as one of contradiction between two ideologies, namely Hindu hierarchical and Muslim egalitarian, while in fact as Fanselow (1996, 223) puts it, ‘it is rather a matter of two competing interpretations and strategies of behaviour, which are employed to make sense of changing economic and political realities, and therefore have to be understood in the context of these realities’. This perceived contradiction often appears because of a simplistic, reductionist, and ahistorical stereotyped notion of Islam as a completely egalitarian model of the social order (Fanselow 1996). The latter relates to identifying which groups belong to a particular civilisation, in this case a ‘Pan-Indian civilisation’ (Dumont 1957c in Leach 1960). This is visible in the difference of opinion between Leach and Barth in Leach’s (1960) edited volume *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North-West Pakistan*. Leach critiques Barth because he dilutes the analytical utility of the term ‘caste’ when analysing Swati Muslim society as a caste society. He agrees with Barth that caste is a structural phenomenon but cannot, as a concept, be applied worldwide as it ‘denotes a particular species of structural organisation indissolubly linked with (...) a Pan-Indian civilisation’ (Leach 1960, 5). The problem here is, I feel, that there is an assumption that only Hindus are to be classified as ‘people of the Indus’.

The Hindu/Muslim categorisation was further exacerbated by the British Raj census’ categories (Mayaram 1997) and caste ‘recreated’ as the central symbol of Hindu society

(see Dirks 2001), so to admit its structures in Muslim societies could take us to negate Muslim identity (Fanselow 1996). When the Portuguese arrived in India in the fifteenth century, they noticed that the population was socially stratified according to notions of 'purity of blood' with distinct occupational functions (Klass 1993, 27). In Portuguese the word used for this distinction was *casta*⁵ – meaning lineage or breed – later on anglicised into 'caste'. The Sanskrit word for what the British identified as caste was 'varna', which actually meant 'colour', that is, a racial trait. The Portuguese though, were not talking about racial purity, but purity of descent – in other words, they were talking about 'endogamy' (Klass 1993). In their aim to use caste as 'a single term capable of expressing, organising, and above all "systematising" India's diverse forms of social identity, community, and organisation' (Dirks 2001, 5), colonial census officials quite often mixed *varna* and the more observable *jati* – literally meaning 'thus born' (Samarendra 2011). This does not mean caste is a colonial creation; caste and politics were always part of the history of the subcontinent (Gilmartin 1994; Gupta 2004). It does lead us though to move away from Dumont's notion of caste as a rigid system based on ritual dominance and relative purity (with Brahmins on top) to caste as a constructed notion. We can then think of caste as either a constant struggle between kinship and kingship – structurally keeping society together by taking its form from both the former (endogamous units) and the latter (hierarchical organisation which is ritually necessary) – with kingship attempting to assert itself against kinship but constantly failing because of economic and political conditions (Quigley 1993), or better, we can think of caste as discrete identities articulated through multiple contesting hierarchies (Gupta 2004).

Since the notion of caste is then a constructed one, debates about the existence of caste and social hierarchy in South Asian Muslim societies must be localised, taking into consideration Hindu/Muslim liminality (Mayaram 1997) and, as Vatuk (1996, 229) puts it, the need to 'try to come to a better understanding of how South Asian Muslims themselves think about identity and difference, equality and inequality'. Several authors identify social stratification in South Asian Muslim societies as 'the product of a dynamic interplay between Islamic ideology and the socio-economic and historical forces', where the latter play a more influential role than the former (Bhatty 1996, 247). Socio-economic and political changes in India (Bhatty 1996; Gupta 2004) and Pakistan (Gilmartin 1994) have continually had an impact on these societies' social stratifications, not by bringing more egalitarian structures, but by making these stratifications more fluid. The quest for this fluidity – and not equality – has been recently examined by several authors when studying the political struggle of Indian lower caste Muslims – generally known as Muslim Dalits – versus Muslim upper castes – known as Ashraf⁶ – in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar (Ahmad 2003; Ali 2010). Likewise, in AJK the socio-economic and political changes, particularly the ones originated in the 1970s, did not flatten social stratification but made it more fluid and characterised by an undercurrent of ambiguity.

Due to a dearth of literature on AJK, I will first describe how social stratification is lived in Pakistani Punjab, as its social structures – and the terms used – are the most similar to AJK and, according to my informants, a good representation of (social) life in this region until the 1970s. Although not ethnically Punjabis, people from AJK – especially from the old Punjab Hills States of Poonch (central AJK) and Bhimber (southern AJK) – always felt more an affinity with what is today Pakistani Punjab than with Jammu, the Kashmir Valley, or Gilgit-Baltistan (Snedden 2012; Wingate 1959). While the north of today's AJK was part of the Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir, Poonch and Bhimber remained separate hill states (Hutchinson and Vogel 1933) until relatively close to 1947. Even before the existence of the Princely State, during Sikh rule, these areas were kept

as part of the Khalsa Darbar of Lahore, making it effectively a district of Lahore (Huttenback 2004). Particularly Poonchis and Mirpuris always shared close historical, geographical, economic, cultural, and linguistic links with the northern districts of Pakistani Punjab and the Hazarawal belt of Kyber Pakhtunkhwa (Snedden 2012). For instance, during the British Raj, of the 70,000 Kashmiri soldiers who fought in World War Two, about 60,000 were from this region, ‘one of the most important recruiting grounds for the Indian Army’ (Wingate 1959, 108), recruited as ‘Punjabi Mussalmans’ for the Punjab Regiment (Dawson 1994; Korbel 1954).⁷

Quom, zat, and biradari in Pakistan

At the end of the day, it’s all about caste. (Zeeshan, Syed businessman in Bagh city)

Most students of Pakistan Punjab’s social stratification either have the view that – without ruling caste out – the ‘system of social stratification and political power [is] based on class’ (Ahmad 1977, 70), or – without ruling class out – recognise that there is something ‘caste-like’ that ‘embodies the primordial loyalties which structure (...) social organisation’ (Alavi 1972, 1). Most authors use for ‘caste-like’ the kinship system as the main social unit in Pakistani Muslim communities (Alavi 1972, 2001; Alvi 2007; Mohmand and Gazdar 2007; Shaw 2000a; Werbner 1989, 1990), which, in Punjab and AJK is often referred to as *quom*, *zat*, or *biradari*.⁸ These networks assume a corporate structure that performs political and economic functions (Mohmand and Gazdar 2007), with ‘notions such as blood purity also playing a tremendous role in defining the boundaries of the group’ (Alavi 2001, 46).

There are two main reasons why *quoms*, *zats*, and *biradaris* can be perceived as ‘caste-like’. First, most of them use the names that are traditionally associated with Hindu *jatis* (Shaw 2000b). Second, they share principles of endogamy, hierarchy, and sometimes even pollution. Because these terms are often used interchangeably (Nazir 1993) there is little agreement in the literature of what constitutes (or what separates) *quom*, *zat*, and *biradari*, with most authors preferring the use of the latter as an encapsulating term for the whole. Werbner (1989, 294) points that by doing so, *biradari* ‘disguises the immanence of caste behind a facade of fraternal kinship’. This is also related to the root of the words, with *quom* and *biradari* seen as more ‘neutral’ – possibly even implying equality – ‘while the use of the notion of *zat* implies ranking as well as non-kinship’ (Werbner 1989, 298), which would go against the egalitarian principle of Islam. As Lyon (2004) points out though, *quom* affiliation does not make men equal, it makes them more approachable. This interchangeably is not unique to Pakistan though; in Kangra Parry (1979, 131) finds that ‘the term *jat* may be used to designate a *varna*, a “caste” or a clan, and it is only the general context which indicates the sort of unit under discussion’.

Biradari itself can be contentious; different conceptions of *biradari* come with different drawings of boundaries, as Shaw (2000a) notices with her informants having different definitions and adding or removing households from a particular *biradari*. Alavi (1972) realises this problem when he mentions two constituent principles of *biradari*: horizontal fraternal ties (contemporaries) and vertical lines of descent (ancestral). He further divides *biradaris* into three broad categories: a more general meaning as a descent group; a more restrained descent group with mutual knowledge of and empirically determinable descent (*biradari* of recognition – taken from Mayer’s ‘kindred of recognition’); and a *biradari* of recognition that participates in gift rituals (*biradari* of participation).⁹ According to Werbner (1989, 295), Alavi (1972), Eglar (1960), and Ahmad (1977) emphasise that the *biradari* is a

patrilineage, but none of them give any examples 'of such a patrilineage except as it exists in a single village'. *Biradari* as patrilineage, she says, mainly operates in outlining the *biradari* at village level, as at inter-village level it is more the marriage cycle among members of a single caste and named section (Werbner 1989).

This distinction of *biradari* as village kin group and as a marriage cycle is important because at inter-village level 'the principle of inclusion or exclusion in a *biradari* is based on affinity or prior affinity rather than descent' (Werbner 1989, 295). So for instance, if a man is a Sheikh, he identifies himself with all the Sheikhs in South Asia as part of his *quom*; all the Sheikhs that he can identify as related to him through patrilineage or affinity are part of his *zat*; and within these, all the Sheikhs that participate in gift rituals with his family are part of his *biradari* of participation. When Shaw (2000b, 96) states that 'kinship is the predominant principle of social organisation at village level in rural Pakistan', she is actually talking about one category: the *biradari* of participation. The same happens with Mohmand and Gazdar's (2007) research in rural Punjab, when exploring the determinants of social exclusion in rural Pakistan. It is at the level of the *biradari* of participation that most social protection mechanisms occur according to these authors, as witnessed by Eglar (1960), Wakil (1970), and Alavi (1972) when looking at the main gift exchange ritual called *vartan bhanji* (in Punjabi 'buying sweets').¹⁰

The principal mechanism that upholds the *biradari* structure is endogamy, that is, marriage within the *biradari* (Shaw 2000b), with preferential patrilineal parallel cousin marriage (Wakil 1970). There are several justifications for this practice, a complex mixture of cultural (Shaw 2000a), religious (Alavi 1972; Shaw 2000a), and economic (Mohmand and Gazdar 2007) reasons. Alavi (1972, 6–7) notes that 'control over marriages is a major factor in maintaining the cohesion of *biradaris*' and its degree 'appears to vary directly with the degree of strictness in enforcing endogamy and regulating marriages within the *biradari*'. According to Mohmand and Gazdar (2007, 5) the leaders of the *biradari* of participation use their traditional power to make decisions on marriage, exclusion, and to 'mediate access to social services and livelihood opportunities'. But endogamy on its own is not sufficient; active membership in this group needs to be maintained, most often by gift exchange rituals: called *vartan bhanji* in Punjab, *lena-dena* [take and give] throughout Pakistan, and *niendra* [the list] in AJK. The principle is simple: gifts in cash or kind are given to a household during certain ceremonial occasions (e.g. weddings and births), by members of their *biradari* of participation and, to a certain extent, by close friends (*rishtedars*). The essential feature is not the gift per se, but the obligation to reciprocate on a subsequent occasion (Alavi 1972; Shaw 2000a; Wakil 1970). Next time though, the receiver has to give an amount slightly higher than received, so the debtor becomes a creditor.¹¹ This keeps the *vartan bhanji* alive and with it the link between the *biradari* members.

It is important though not to see these strategies of gift exchange as a positive force only. As Wakil (1970, 702–703) notes, 'the most peculiar feature of the *biradari*, however, is the melange of a very fierce kind of competition and noble cooperation'. While there is an invidious competition within the *biradari* – where the aim is not to 'keep up with the Joneses' or to 'leave the Joneses behind', but to 'keep the Joneses down' (Wakil 1970, 703) – there is always also a minimum of cooperation, as *biradaris* have numerous integrative functions (Alavi 1972; Gilmartin 1994; Shaw 2000a; Wakil 1970; Werbner 1990). Lefebvre (1999) states that one of the major reasons for this cooperation lies on notions of risk and security; in a society where the State does not provide any kind of social security (to which I would add universality of services as well) people trust more their own *biradari* members than strangers, as the interdependence of these kinship networks mean security (and access to services).

Quom, zat, and biradari in AJK

As I previously mentioned, *biradari* is a contentious concept and therefore the names and histories of different *biradaris* in AJK are themselves contentious. Before we delve into social stratification and social boundaries in AJK, it is worth pointing out at this stage that the *quom* and *biradari* names I use in this paper were the ones used in this cluster of villages and generally in the region. I do not intend to claim stake at a definite classification of these groups, nor do I intend to correct names or origins.

The largest ‘groups’ in AJK are roughly Gujjars and Rajputs throughout the region, Sudhans in the centre, and Jats in the south. In Bagh District the largest *quoms* are Mughal, Narma, and Raja, although there are differences within each *mauza* (revenue village) and each settlement. In most *mauzas* and settlements around Chinati bazaar Mughals are often the largest *quom*, though Syed and Kiani are a majority in a few. As seen in Tables 1 and 2,¹² Mughals are not only the majority in Nakkar and Khorian *mauzas* but also in the five settlements out of these *mauzas* that surround Chinati bazaar – Bagla, Basantkot, Thial, Khorian, and Sarian. In Hothala *mauza* the Kianis and Syeds are

Table 1. *Biradari/Quom* composition of *mauzas* surrounding Chinati bazaar.

<i>Mauza</i>	Nakkar	Khorian	Hothala
<i>Biradaris/</i>	Awan	Alavi	KIANI
<i>Quoms</i>	Bhatti	Awan	Mughal
	Lohar	Lohar	Narma
	Khawaja	Kiani	Raja
	Kiani	Malik	Sudhan
	MUGHAL	Mirza	SYED
	Pathan	Mochi	
	Qureshi	MUGHAL	
	Raja	Nai	
	SYED	Pathan	
		Qasab	
		Qureshi	
		Raja	
		Satti	
		Sheikh	
		Sudhan	
		Syed	

Note: Largest *quoms* in UPPERCASE.

Table 2. *Biradari/Quom* composition of settlements surrounding Chinati bazaar.

<i>Mauza</i> <i>Settlement</i>	Nakkar		Khorian			Hothala Serabad
	Bagla	Basantkot	Thial	Khorian	Sarian	
<i>Biradaris/</i>	MUGHAL	Khawaja	MUGHAL	Kiani	MUGHAL	Mughal
<i>Quoms</i>	Raja	MUGHAL		MUGHAL	Raja	Raja
				Raja	Sheikh	SYED
				Sheikh		

Note: Largest *quoms* in UPPERCASE.

the demographic majority, but in the one settlement that was served by Chinati bazaar – Serabad – the Syeds are the main *quom*.

Throughout the region there is no apparent clear definition of the terms *quom*, *zat*, and *biradari*, although there is a core of consensus on their broad meanings.¹³ Most people would use geographical boundaries and size to differentiate the three. All agreed that *biradari* was smaller and *quom* larger, and locate *biradari* within the limits of a village or neighbourhood. *Zat* was more ambiguous, with some people stating it was the same as *biradari*, while others saying it was the same as *quom*. All would translate *quom* into ‘nation’, *zat* as either ‘caste’ or ‘tribe’, and *biradari* as either ‘tribe’ or ‘kinship’. Similar to what Parry (1979) saw in Kangra with the term *jat* used to mean *varna*, caste or clan, in this region *biradari* was used as the all-encompassing term for *quom*, *zat*, and *biradari*, depending on the context it was used. Despite most talking generally about the *biradari* system, they would often acknowledge that this created erroneous generalisations. Mohammad Azfar, a Mughal ex-serviceman from Bagla brought out this point when I asked him what were these groups that called themselves Mughals, Syeds, Awans, Rajas, Mochis, Mirasis, and so on. ‘*Quom* means nation, *zat* is a caste in a particular area and *biradari* is a community with common interests. We actually use the wrong word, i.e. we use *biradari* while we should be using *zat*.’ There was also a gendered difference when using these terms to describe social stratification. Men mostly used *biradari* while women used *quom*. For women the latter was what they identified as caste or tribe, while *biradari* was a lineage-oriented house. Possibly the reason for this differentiation lay in the fact that for women *biradari* was closer to the family, while *quom* included strangers to whom they were connected but were not linked to their domestic cycle.

Quom, *zat*, and *biradari* differentiation happened because of *nasal* (breed) and occupation. To be more specific this differentiation occurred sometimes because of *nasal*, in the case of higher-ranked groups such as Syed or Kiani, and sometimes because of occupation, in the case of lower-ranked groups such as Mochi (cobbler) or Nai (barber). Most people said that this differentiation came from caste boundaries based on ritual pedigree (Arab descent, or being related to the house of Muhammad) and historical power (former rulers), and from historical class divisions – Bashir said that ‘the rich castes had people working for them, so these workers would be the lower castes’. All agreed that the present social stratification was rooted in historical factors, where social mobility was inexistent. *Quoms* were roughly categorised in three broad hierarchical yet porous groups, according to their status and power. In a status-conscious and socially stratified society such as this one, the origins of each *quom*, *zat*, or *biradari* were heavily contested, as was their ‘rank’ within the social hierarchy. This contestation (and lack of agreement) is visible in the following table. Table 3 is a sample of a ranking exercise I conducted individually with several informants from different status groups. The aim of the exercise was to see how people related their *biradari* to other *biradaris*, as well as to identify what was allowed to happen across *biradaris* (e.g. marriage, loans, gifts), and why was there such a ranking. During the exercise I would ask the informant which criteria he was using to rank their importance. While all informants used ‘status’ to signify importance, their definitions differed. For instance while the Syed stressed ‘descent’ as the marker of status, the Mughal and Raja informants used ‘economic power’ and ‘political power’, without necessarily disregarding descent. All informants also stressed ‘education’ as an important marker.

The higher-ranked group generally consisted of *quoms* considered *ashraf* and often *quoms* claiming descent from conquering castes.¹⁴ In the lower-ranked group informants included *quoms* traditionally involved with menial occupations and/or in contact with polluting substances. Finally, the middle-ranked group was more ambiguous, as it was composed of

Table 3. Ranking of *biradaris/quoms* according to three informants.

Respondent	Syed	Mughal	Raja
Group I	<u>Syed</u> <u>Abbasi</u> <u>Kiani</u> <u>Alavi</u> <u>Awan</u> <u>Qureshi</u>	Mughal <u>Syed</u> – Narma – Sudhan	<u>Syed</u> <u>Abbasi</u> Raja Sudhan Narma – Mughal – <u>Kiani</u>
Group II	Sudhan Mughal or Maldiyal Raja – Rajput – Janjua Narma Khawaja Gujjar Pathan – Durani Sheikh Satti Khokar Bhatti	<u>Abbasi</u> – <u>Kiani</u> Raja – Gujjar – Khwaja	<u>Khawaja</u> <u>Awan</u> Lohar Khokar Gujjar Rajput Julaha
Group III	All at the same level: Mirasi – Kumhar – Mochi – Julaha – Lohar – Nai – Qasab – Kalal	Rajput – Durani – Sheikh Kumhar – <u>Awan</u> – Pathan Lohar – Khokar – Satti Julaha – Bhatti – Qasab Mirasi – Kalal – Mochi – Nai	Nai Mochi Mirasi Kumhar or Kalal Qasab

Note: In **bold**: menial *quoms*; underlined: Ashraf *quoms*.

quoms which were neither higher-ranked nor lower-ranked, that is, neither *ashraf* nor *kammis*. In fact, the ambiguity of the middle group could be seen even in the way people referred to these groups, as they had a name for the higher- and lower-ranked groups (*oonchi zat* and *neechi zat*, respectively),¹⁵ but not for the middle-ranked one. This hierarchy was similar to Werbner's (1989, 290) description of Punjabi Muslim *zats* which were

ranked hierarchically in a system with persons of high ritual pedigree located at the top of the hierarchy, followed by 'conquerors' of Muslim and Hindu origin, followed by categories of agricultural cultivators and artisan castes, with service castes and those coming into contact with polluting substances located at the bottom of the scale.

Within each group *quoms* were also placed hierarchically, but if there was limited agreement among informants on which *quoms* belonged where in each group, as elsewhere (Ahmad 1978) their ranking within the groups was even more debatable. There were exceptions to this disagreement, namely in the case of the Syed, always placed in the higher-ranked group, and most service castes, placed at the bottom. It is worth mentioning that, like Werbner (1989) witnessed in Pakistani migrants in Manchester, here too informants would often place their own *quom* at a higher level. Higher-ranked *quoms* would have more intricate knowledge about rankings than lower-ranked ones, possibly because the former had historically always been more literate¹⁶ and in a position of power.¹⁷

The strict hierarchy and social boundaries that defined this region in the past created – and were themselves products of – social and economic exclusion defined along *quom* lines, with the higher-ranked groups using their born-status within the hierarchy to gain access to power and resources, often at the expense of the lower-ranked ones. As Hameed, a Mughal mason from Sarian, put it, back then 'there was a feeling of superiority within each level

towards the lower level'. One of the crucial factors that excluded individuals was linked to notions of blood purity. As status and power were closely linked with hierarchy, the only way for someone to cross social boundaries by moving up in the hierarchy would be to marry above his/her status. However this was extremely rare as taking a husband or even a wife from a lower level meant 'polluting' the group.¹⁸

This separation between *quoms* was also visible through ritual purity. '*Separation used to happen because of hasab-nasab* [meaning progeny, genealogy, family background].' At particular events where all *quoms* would congregate, for example, at weddings and pan-chayat meetings, the seating arrangements were done in a way of showing hierarchy, with lower-ranked *quoms* always seating on the ground below the higher-ranked *quoms*. At these events, if food was distributed it would be prepared and served separately according to hierarchy. Even during prayers higher-ranked *quoms* would pray in front and lower-ranked *quoms* in the back. Commensality between higher- and lower-ranked *quoms* in public was discouraged and frowned upon. Qasim, a Kiani political agent¹⁹ from Hothala still remembers what happened to him when he tried to cross this boundary:

When I was in school I used to buy and eat bhundi [local sweet] with a Nai [barber quom] class-mate. Once I went to a wedding and saw him eating alone in a corner. I went there and started eating with him and all my friends and relatives made fun of me, calling me a Nai.

The reason for this separation lay in the fact that, for all purposes, lower-ranked *quoms* were regarded as dirty (*ganda*) and sharing food or sitting together meant allowing oneself to be polluted.

The importance and the character of this *biradari*-based stratification, though, had changed over time. Particularly influential in this process of change were a series of events that started to occur in the 1970s, namely, the introduction of universal franchise, mass migration to the Gulf countries, and increasing levels of universal education. In the following section, I analyse how notions and practices of hierarchy and social stratification evolved over this period, identifying the factors that made this change possible, as well as the ones that continued to enforce it.

Changes in A JK's social stratification: from hierarchy to difference

Most people in the villages surrounding Chinati bazaar state that the strict hierarchy that once characterised their society is a thing of the past. There is now more equality among *quoms* and the distinction between these groups is based on 'difference' rather than hierarchy. In other words, social stratification changed from a vertical to a horizontal system, from hierarchy to difference. Hierarchy is only one kind of stratification, one where the layers are arranged vertically and therefore ranked. Dumont (1970, 66) defines hierarchy as 'the principle by which the elements of a whole are ranked in relation to the whole', placing it in a continuous scale. While some societies are hierarchically organised, notions of difference are dominant in other stratified systems, where layers are organised horizontally or separately, rather than vertically or hierarchically, like in the case of language, religion or nationality (Gupta 1991). In these cases 'there are incommensurable entities or units, that constitute different systems of stratification', where instead of being in a continuous scale they are placed in discrete categories (Gupta 1991, 8).

It is useful to go back to Werbner's (1989) assertion that Punjabi Muslims use the term *biradari* (and *quom*) to imply equality – and therefore a social structure more Islamic – instead of *zat*, which entailed ranking. The same can be said for this region and the

preference for using the terms *biradari* – ‘brotherhood’ – and *quom* – ‘nation’ – implying that their social stratification is based on difference, as opposed to *zat* – ‘caste’ – which is hierarchical and potentially un-Islamic. Yet, this shift in the nature of local social stratification is not an exercise simply based on semantics; it is something that they say happens in their everyday lives. Something changed to make them perceive their society as more equal and less hierarchical. To be precise, four interconnected factors changed making this shift in social stratification possible, namely migration patterns, land ownership, education levels, and democratic politics.

Migration

In 1974, at the Second Islamic Summit Conference, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto struck a deal with oil-producing Gulf countries, where Pakistan would benefit from subsidised oil in exchange for migrant labour (Lefebvre 1999). AJK witnessed a significant increase in the level of migration, with Bhutto’s administration easing the red tape, reducing the price for acquiring a Pakistani passport, and facilitating access to Gulf States’ visas. As a continuation of migratory practices, the first to go from this region were ex-army personnel to work in security-related jobs. With an increased demand for manual labour, many of these ex-servicemen started sponsoring relatives and *biradari* members to join them in the Gulf – some informally while others made a profession out of it, becoming ‘Gulf agents’. The fast growth of migrant labour pushed a demand for catering services, where people from AJK used their experience and reputation within Pakistan as good domestic servants and cooks to insert themselves within this industry as cooks and waiters. A third group to migrate were schoolteachers, who made use of their education to gain access to lower management positions within construction and catering industries in the Gulf. As the migration flow increased exponentially, Gulf agents started hiring beyond their social networks. This meant that men from all *quoms* migrated, including men from the lower-ranked ones, as long as they could afford it.

Although migration data are hard to get for AJK, a survey of 33 villages in the early 1980s shows about 55% of households with migrants receiving remittances (PERI 1982 in P&D AJK 1996) and off-farm employment generating about 70% of family income (Fida 1999 in FAO 2003). According to Shaffer (2005) 40% of households in AJK today have at least one member working overseas. The impact of remittances is also visible in the decrease of household debt: in 1972 46% of all farming households in AJK – and 60% in Bagh District – were under some form of indebtedness; by 2000, and with no increase in agricultural or industrial production, this figure dropped to 9% for AJK and 20% for Bagh District (GoAJK 1975, 2000).

Similar to other regions in South Asia (Gardner and Osella 2004) Gulf migration allowed for social mobility of not just individuals, but of whole groups. It contributed to the crumbling of a key boundary within social stratification in AJK, namely occupational specialisation. Lower-ranked *quoms* – whose identity was linked to menial professions – and small peasants became migrants and *mazdoors*, and, upon return, shopkeepers and *zamindars*. As remittances started to flow, migrants’ families would use them to improve their living standards, investing in land acquisition and in educating the next generation. Their children could become teachers, engineers, and business people – just like everybody else, irrespective of *quom*.

Land

As I mention above, migrants used remittances to buy land. Since at least Mughal rule land ownership was seen more as a privilege than a right, being an identifier of higher status

Table 4. Farms reporting use of inorganic fertilisers and pesticides (percentage).

Year	Fertiliser			Plant protection		
	Bagh District	AJK	Pakistan	Bagh District	AJK	Pakistan
1972	11	18	52	0	0	22
2000	25	37	75	0.04	0.24	27

Sources: GoAJK (1975, 2000).

(Ahmad 1977). In Punjab, colonial rule further exacerbated this through its Punjab Alienation of Land Act 1900,²⁰ which divided the region into agricultural (or *zamindar*) and non-agricultural tribes.²¹ In the Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir, only landholders of Jammu and Kashmir Valley were granted proprietary rights, with most of the land of what is today AJK belonging to the ruling family, administered by a few Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim sardars as numberdars, and the general population having to submit to *begaar* [corvée] (Snedden 2012). While Punjab had to wait for 1959 for its first land reform, AJK did it soon after 1947. Large tracts of land previously ‘owned’ by Hindu and Sikh *numberdars* were soon taken over by the local population, as well as by refugees from Indian-administered Kashmir, allowing for non-*zamindari* groups to own land – if they could afford it.

With land ownership so closely linked with status, everyone would buy land as soon as they could, even when agriculture was not profitable. The aim is not to become a farmer (*kissan*) but a landowner (*zamindar*) and thus trying to move up in the rank. While people in many parts of Pakistan have modernised their agriculture, majority of landowners in AJK have not, only using limited amounts of inorganic fertiliser and no pesticides (see Table 4). Yet, just across in northern Punjab, where agriculture is similarly rainfed, done in small landholdings in hilly terrain, and where a large number of men migrate to the Gulf or enlist in the army, people still modernise farming.

Today, AJK is characterised by land being widely distributed, with 86% of private property ownership (P&D AJK 2008) – from 72% in 1980 (P&D AJK 1980) – as compared to 37% in rural Pakistan (GoAJK 2000), but with average landholdings smaller than one hectare, making it unsustainable to grow crops, especially staple foods such as maize, wheat, or rice (see Table 5). The absence of large landholdings and the more equal distribution of land made land ownership stop being a factor of social stratification and exclusion, opposite to what happens in neighbouring Punjab where it was (Alavi 1972; Ahmad 1977) and still is (Mohmand and Gazdar 2007; Shaw 2000a) a determinant factor defining hierarchy.

Education

Up until the early 1970s access to education was still within the domain of higher-ranked groups, meaning education levels were relatively low despite a small increase in primary

Table 5. Changes in farm sizes, 1972–2000 (percentage of farms reported by hectares).

	<2.5		2.5–12.5		>12.5 to <50		50 and above Pakistan
	Pakistan	AJK	Pakistan	AJK	Pakistan	AJK	
1972	14	57	54	42	29	1	3
2000	36	72	50	26	13	–	1

Sources: GoP (2000) and GoAJK (1975, 2000).

Table 6. Number of students, teachers, and schools in AJK (public primary and secondary).

Year	1947	1974	1989	2004	2008
Enrolment		192,509	585,238	567,786	556,217
Teachers		4091	20,474	23,594	28,615
Schools	291	1526	5757	5948	5945

Sources: AEPAM (2006, 2010) and P&D AJK (1980, 1990, 2009).

education enrolment since 1947. From the mid-1970s onwards, the role of the state was crucial in trying to universalise education, with a drastic boost in the creation of public secondary schools, and enrolment rates increasing exponentially (Table 6). But the state was not the only actor pushing for a drastic increase in educational levels; seen by many households as a form of investment, education became a way of making sure the next generations would have access to better employment opportunities. By early 2000, the annual household educational expenditure on all children, regardless of age or gender, was higher in AJK than any Pakistani province and twice the country's average (Aslam and Kingdon 2008). As elsewhere (Ciotti 2006), by attaining formal education many middle-ranked and lower-ranked status groups were also trying to attain higher status. Since then literacy figures for most of AJK became substantially higher than those of Pakistan (Figure 1).

The quasi-universality of education²² meant that every child regardless of *quom* would be together in school: learning, sitting, and sharing food together. While there was still some discrimination and exclusion among *quoms*, the daily interaction often made these children question social hierarchy. The combination of increasing remittances and a demand for more and better education created a space for the appearance of private schooling since the 1990s. Many migrants started sending their children to private schools (a reason why public school enrolment decreased), an act which became connoted with wealth and status. By 2005 there were 2295 primary and secondary private schools in AJK, with 16,074 teachers and 223,275 students (AEPAM 2006).

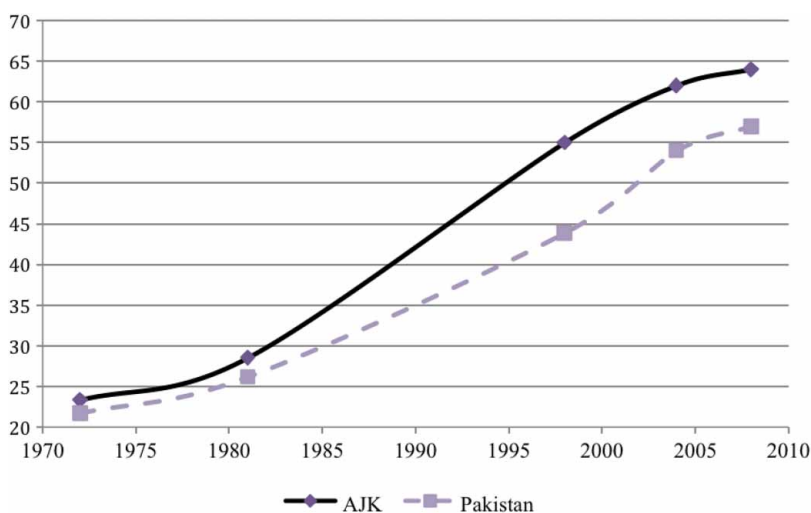


Figure 1. Literacy rates for AJK and Pakistan (percentage).

Sources: AEPAM (2006, 2010), P&D AJK (1980, 1990, 2009), and PCO (1998).

With several groups becoming enfranchised, education became a key priority in AJK, not only as a service, but also as a form of job creation. The change in education levels can be seen not only in the increase of public schools, but also in public sector employment: by 1980 42% was in education, as compared to 12% in the police force and 8% in health, the next two highest forms of public sector employment (P&D AJK 1980). From the mid-1970s onwards, remittances and clientelistic politics were important factors in improving services throughout the region, albeit in a targeted manner. This was the time that many villages got access to more and better educational institutions, along with electricity, tarred roads, and some health centres. Up until the 2005 earthquake there were about 40,000 primary and secondary school teachers in both public and private schools across AJK and, despite a sizeable number dying during the earthquake,²³ their number has increased again through state and non-state post-earthquake reconstruction and rehabilitation (Loureiro 2012).

Politics

The bounty of Gulf migration occurred at the same time that drastic political changes were taking place in the region. The introduction of universal suffrage in 1974 became a great avenue to challenge the existing social stratification, with political power being now decided by demographics rather than landownership and status.²⁴ Many *quoms* with large numbers within their constituencies started forming vote blocs (known as *dharas*) and supporting candidates from within the *quom*. As the state provides targeted rather than universal services and is the major employer, the rationale behind these clientelistic networks is that once their candidate is in power they would have preferential access to services and jobs. Similar to other parts of South Asia (see Ali 2010; Price and Ruud 2010) a 'patronage democracy' soon developed where democratic practices were seen as 'direct or indirect ways of getting a share of state resources and as ways to obtain or maximise power' (Chandra 2004 in Michelutti 2010). Like in rural Pakistan (Lyon 2004; Mohmand 2011) AJK democratic politics are heavily affected by political organisation through vertical clientelistic networks and horizontal *biradari* lines. Akhtar (2013), who highlights that bloc voting is still prevalent with Pakistani and Mirpuri communities in the UK, calls the use of *biradari* networks in a patronage relationship for political gain '*biradari*-politicking' and Mohmand (2011) calls it *biradari*-ism.

Larger *quoms* that were until then at lower levels within the social hierarchy became elevated through *biradari* politics, effectively increasing the fluidity of the social stratification. While in southern AJK the numerically large *zamindari quoms* have almost always been the politically dominant groups, the absence of large *zamindaris* in central and northern AJK meant that many non-*zamindari quoms* with large numbers within their constituencies started forming vote blocs and supporting candidates from within the *quom*. Evans (2010, 18) found strong *biradari* allegiance among the Jats in Mirpur and Sudhans in Rawalakot, stating that 'in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, political organisation among *biradaris* remains as influential as political parties'. For the past 40-odd years *quom* candidates have been battling for power using a mixture of clientelism and *biradari*-ism. These candidates act like 'bosses' (Price and Ruud 2010, xxiv) redistributing 'resources in relatively small-scale domains (...) with a first (amoral) imperative of maintaining the dominance of the leader and his establishment', often practising the role of the local middlemen – the 'fixers', known here as political agents – between vote blocs and the state machinery. A clear example of this was visible during post-2005 earthquake assistance. Despite efforts to reach the more vulnerable, often this assistance – not universal but targeted – was hijacked by the ones closer to power, namely the elites within the

majority *quoms*, who proceeded to distribute this assistance by incorporating it in their clientelistic networks.

Endogamy

While these changes all contributed to a certain levelling of social stratification, one crucial factor – endogamy – remained the same. As I mentioned before, the two main factors for the old differentiation and hierarchy were *nasal* and occupation. While occupation disappeared, *nasal* remained. People were constantly being reminded of that. When Yasir, a young Mughal shopkeeper proudly boasted that they (the Mughals) ruled over the bazaar – because they were the majority – someone quickly added, ‘Yes, but don’t forget the Syeds will always be on top of you ...’ More often than before, marriages did occur between *quoms* of similar rank, mostly within the middle group. But these were a small minority of cases, as most people still married within their *quom*, and within it their *biradari*.²⁵

Considerations of relatedness are important in marriage choices but as elsewhere (Das 1973; Donnan 1985; Fischer 1991; Shaw 2001) these are made with a number of pragmatic considerations based not only on cultural rules or preferences, but also on political, economic, and social factors (Shaw 2001). The importance of *quom* and *biradari* endogamy is not unique to AJK: back in the early 1970s, Qazi (1973 in Wakil 1991) finds ‘caste’ to be the number one reason for choosing whom to marry in rural Faisalabad; in his exhaustive study among the Dhunds in Murree, Donnan (1988) finds that of all marriages 52% were within kin and 92% were within *quom*; in urban Punjab, Fischer (1991) groups 85% of total marriages in a lower-middle-class neighbourhood as within *zat*; in her sample of Oxford Pakistani Diaspora, Shaw (2000a) accounts for 87% of marriages happening within the *biradari*; and in Bristol, Charsley (2005) finds no evidence of preference for patrilineal marriages – instead the clear distinction was between marrying out of or within the *biradari*. Two facts come out of these cases: first, figures are extremely high for marriages within *biradari* or *quom* – what Fischer (1991) calls marrying like-for-like; and second, there is no clear border between what constitutes *biradari* and *quom* – and it is Shaw (2000a) who rightly identifies the central importance of the flexible notion of *biradari* for the reasons between pragmatic and theoretical marriage choices.

Several authors (Das 1973; Shaw 2001; Wakil 1991) posit that in the future the importance of marrying inside the family might diminish, but arranged marriages within *biradari* (s) will continue. In line with these predictions, many informants in Chinati also brought up the point that many marriages were now happening outside the family. Ijaz, a Syed ex-serviceman said, ‘initially we only married within the *khandan* [extended family]. Because of health problems we’ve stopped marrying first cousins, but we still marry within our *quom*’. Also, like in Sylhet (Gardner 1995, 192), ‘rather than only being a transaction between households, marriage [had become] increasingly to do with partnership’, which was visible in the importance given to love marriages in peoples’ marital choices. Yet, these love marriages mostly happened within *quoms*, or sometimes with *quoms* ranked similarly, but never with lower-ranked *quoms*. According to Imtiaz, a Mughal shopkeeper, ‘Mughals will never marry a Nai even if he’s the Prime Minister, rich with a PhD. They would marry Sudhans because they are of equal *quom*.’ Similar to Grover’s (2011, 207) findings in urban Delhi, where caste was more important than education, employment, and class mobility, here too ‘prejudice against certain inter-caste (...) unions remained intense’. The reason that people from *quoms* belonging to the higher- and middle-ranked groups used to justify not marrying lower-ranked *quoms* was one of ritual purity, which they would

equate to honour. Hameed told me ‘lower *quoms* are *ganda* [dirty], that’s why we don’t marry them. Not because they’re poor, but because they have no honour’. Many added that with the passage of time and education these *quoms* had become more honourable. Qasim, the Kiani political agent, linked this education with equality: ‘Nowadays all are treated with the same respect. There is *shahoor* [consciousness] and education. In the next 25 years the whole *biradari* system will disappear.’ Until then though, lower-ranked *quoms* are still excluded from marrying above and therefore accessing other *quoms*’ networks.

As access to power and resources is mostly channelled through *quom* and *biradari* ties, the inability of lower-ranked *quoms* to marry above can be interpreted as powerlessness. With demographics and electoral politics playing a bigger role, social exclusion reappears based not only on hierarchy, but now also based on numerical strength: larger *quoms* are now more dominant, using their large networks to get preferential access to jobs and other resources through *biradari*-ism. Since society is still stratified through *quoms*, numerically smaller *quoms* face potential exclusion. The perceived shift from ‘hierarchy’ to ‘difference’ adds a new dimension to social exclusion, as inequality continues to exist, though in a slightly altered form. If, on the one hand, there are still elements of hierarchy that continue to reinforce pockets of social exclusion based on status among its lower-ranked *quoms*, on the other hand, the new realities of demographics create new pockets of exclusion among its minority *quoms*. More worryingly, sometimes these *quoms* are one and the same.

Conclusion

The nature of social stratification in AJK – once characterised by a hierarchical order enforced by strict endogamy, occupational specialisation, and ritual pollution – has changed over time. It appears that there is now more equality among *quoms*, with group boundaries based on difference rather than hierarchy. Changes in land ownership, democratic politics, migration patterns, and education levels have contributed to the perception of a flattening of social stratification. But while these four interconnected factors changed, one crucial aspect – endogamy – remained the same, thus keeping the boundaries alive. So, in effect, socio-economic and political changes did not flatten social stratification. Instead, they made it more fluid and ambiguous. Just as market economics and democratic politics have not been sufficient to eliminate caste identities in Indian society (Gupta 2004), in AJK too these changes have not reduced the impact of *biradari*-ism. Gupta (2004) and I both argue that in each case, what must also change is the preponderance of endogamy.

Until then, the best strategy for *quoms* not traditionally considered higher-ranked to access power and resources may be to keep social stratification fluid and ambiguous. We can see a similar quest for fluidity, rather than equality, being used by Muslim Dalits as a political tool against Ashrafs representing all Muslims in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Maharashtra (Ahmad 2003; Ali 2010). We can also see it in the way Pakistani families in Britain keep the notion of *biradari* fluid to allow for pragmatic marriage choices (Shaw 2000a), and in the conscious ambiguity of *Gujjarism* in northern Pakistani Punjab, where Gujjars play with *quom* affiliation to access individual benefits rather than the welfare of all Gujjars (Lyon 2004). Finally, we can see it in AJK when larger middle-ranked *quoms* reframe social stratification as ‘difference’ to blur boundaries, allowing simultaneously for inclusion (through democratic politics) and exclusion (through *biradari*-ism).

Many residents of the villages surrounding Chinati bazaar refer to the fact that over time social stratification in their region evolved from being based on ‘hierarchy’ to being defined by ‘difference’. Yet, inequality continues to exist through the unequal power of majority and minority social groups. As such, despite these changes, historical cleavages based on caste and kinship continue to perpetuate social boundaries. Although notions of hierarchy and social stratification have evolved over time – as did the basis for determining relative position within hierarchies – the social position of individuals, and social and economic exclusion are still often defined through membership in the *biradari*. Social boundaries might have changed their meaning but they did not disappear. Despite all the changes it is still through *biradari*-ism that people access power and resources.

Notes

1. Chinati is a pseudonym. To maintain confidentiality, the names of all the informants and villages discussed in this paper are pseudonyms.
2. For the sake of consistency throughout this special issue, I use AJK instead of Pakistan-administered Kashmir, my preferred term for this region.
3. One of the many unwanted consequences of the territorial dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir is that AJK was, until the 2005 earthquake, a secluded and militarised region of which the world knew little about.
4. I would add to Fanselow’s quote that sometimes it is the observer who decides that caste does not exist.
5. From the Latin *castus* (chaste), implying a lineage kept pure.
6. Plural of *sharif*, meaning noble or highborn used by South Asian Muslims who claim Arab, Persian, or Central Asian descent.
7. Wingate (1959, 108) reports that ‘the coming and going between Poonch and the Punjab of soldiers on leave and of recruiting parties made it far more a province of the Punjab in outlook and in culture than an appendage of Kashmir’.
8. *Quom* can be translated as ‘nation’, *zat* as ‘being’ and *biradari* as ‘brotherhood’. According to Alavi (1972), the latter term comes from the Persian *biradar* (brother), although *brether* is a Proto Indo-European word. For instance, a similar word (*phratry*) was used during the Greek Dark Ages for a cluster of several clans allied into a single category.
9. Wakil (1970) too divides *biradari* into three similar categories: *Zat* or *quom*; *biradari* at large; and effective *biradari*.
10. The name comes from the fact that this gift exchange is done at auspicious moments, during celebrations, which often entail distributing sweets.
11. These amounts are generally fixed by custom.
12. Tables 1 and 2 are the result of a joint estimation by my informants and me. Table 2 is also based on focus group interviews in each settlement (two gender-segregated interviews per settlement).
13. I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for helping me clarify this point.
14. Note that according to the Syed informant *ashraf quoms* are all of proclaimed Arab or Persian descent, and Afghan and Central Asian ‘conquerors’ are not considered *ashraf*.
15. Similar to what Bhatti (1996) found in Uttar Pradesh.
16. The Syeds in particular have lineage records to prove their ‘pedigree’.
17. Possibly these were the ones from whom the colonial census officers recorded most information on castes and social boundaries.
18. In principle taking a wife from a lower-ranked group should not have been a problem as descent was patrilineal. Still, it rarely occurred.
19. A political agent is an informal broker that collects votes for politicians or political parties.
20. While officially the aim was to avoid increasing levels of debt and land being bought by urban, non-agrarian people, the main purpose of this Act was to cultivate certain landowning classes patronised by the colonial rulers. For that

The Board of Revenue shall, by notification in the Official Gazette, determine what bodies of persons in any district or group of districts are to be deemed to be agricultural tribes or groups of agricultural tribes for the purposes of this Act.

21. By tribes colonial rulers meant *quoms* or *zats*.
22. Today, the gross enrolment rate at primary level in AJK is 95% for boys and 88% for girls (P&D AJK 2008).
23. The earthquake struck at 8:50 local time on a Saturday, when most teachers and students were indoors.
24. Despite being *azadi* from Dogra rule in 1947, universal franchise only appeared in the political spectrum of AJK in the 1970s with the AJK Interim Constitution of 1974, where 42 members of the legislative assembly (MLA) were elected directly on the basis of universal suffrage (Mahmud 2006).
25. Out of all the marriages mentioned to me during my fieldwork (about 70-odd), only three were inter-*quom*: a Sheikh took a Raja wife, a Sudhan a Mughal wife, and a Mughal a Pukhtoon wife from Lahore.

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